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Thornton thwarts graffiti by thinking ‘Outside the Box’

Art program aims to decorate fixtures and deter vandalism



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A City of Thornton effort is hoping to turn standard utility boxes into works of art in an effort to cut down on graffiti vandalism and improve the appearance of neighborhood.

TABATHA DEANS



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Tabatha Deans (<mailto:Special to Colorado Community Media>)

After years of removing graffiti from the electrical box on the corner of Eppinger Boulevard and Washington Street, Thornton City decided to fight fire with fire.

Or, rather, paint with paint.

The city commissioned artist Jay Michael Jaramillo to paint a mural on the electrical box last year — and it hasn’t been tagged since.

“Art is a connector of communities,” says Thornton High School graduate Jaramillo. “I never really noticed the box when I was in school, but after painting one I notice more. I think other people do too.”

The success of the “Outside the Box” program, created by Thornton Arts, Sciences and Humanities Council — known as TASHCO — has prompted the expansion of the program this year to include six more electrical boxes throughout the city. More than a dozen artists submitted applications and finalists will have until early summer to complete their murals. That’s when the city will hold an official unveiling.

Traffic and electrical boxes vary by size and are exposed to outside elements continually. Artists must create a mural that will be visually appealing yet able to withstand the elements as well as remain functional for city workers for at least five years.

Each artist will receive an all-inclusive stipend of \$2,000, with \$500 being given upon design approval and contract. Designs cannot contain any offensive materials and will include only original work.

The painting could begin as early as mid-April, once the start-up checks have been awarded. Artists and their crews will be required to adhere to safety and environmental guidelines when they are working in the community.

The humanities council has high hopes for the program -- and not just as a way of decreasing graffiti. The council included that sentiment in its promotional brochures.

"The Outside the Box project will showcase the work of our talented local artists as this public art becomes part of our streetscapes, eventually creating a drive-by art exhibit within the city," it says in the brochure.

The six boxes chosen for painting this year have been targeted with graffiti in the past and were selected by the TASHCO group and by the City's Code Compliance Division.

"This program is a way for us to celebrate local artists while decreasing the amount of graffiti," says Krystle Codrey, arts and volunteer coordinator. "This is only the second year of the program, but we're excited about the future of it."

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